

# Adult Teaching Resources

November 29, 2015



## A Time for Gratitude

You're All I Have — Ruth 1:1-2:23

An Odd Road to a Happy Ending — Ruth 3:1-4:21

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## Hope Waits

**A Time for Anticipation — 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

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# A Time for Anticipation

## 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

### FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Make copies of the handout, “How Big is the “Big C” Church?” for the Information session. Be prepared with names of churches in your community and around the world for the Transformational Exercise. And, know where north, east, south, and west are.

### Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

Name a church in our community that you pass by regularly, but have never attended.

Have you ever visited a church in another country? Where was it?

### Information

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Many churches quote the Apostle’s Creed in worship each Sunday, including the phrase, “I believe in the holy catholic church...” As a Baptist child visiting with friends in their Protestant churches, I sometimes wondered why they said such things. Later, I learned that “catholic” does not refer to the “Roman Catholic” church. Catholic means “universal,” so it includes Roman Catholics as well the Orthodox, Protestant and other churches. The Church (with a capitol C) includes all denominations and persons who claim Jesus as Lord. In the same way, catholic with a “little c” means the same as Church with a “big C.”

[Distribute handout.]

Here’s a little quiz to help us consider how big the big C Church is.

[Allow time to take the quiz, to offer answers and to debrief briefly.]

Our lesson today comes from the earliest written text of the Bible. The “big C” Church was just beginning. Paul wrote a small band of Christians in the town of Thessalonica, in what is now Thessaloniki, Greece. Paul, Silas, and Timothy visited the town with the intention of convincing persons to trust in Jesus Christ.

[Have a class member read Acts 17:1-10a.]

Paul, Silas and Timothy had to flee Thessalonica, but they left part of their hearts there. The new converts had little time to mature or to fortify their faith. Paul sent Timothy back

## Information *continued*

to check on how they were doing. Had they remained followers of Jesus? Had they been terribly persecuted? Would they be open to Paul making another visit?

Timothy did go and came back to Paul with a report. Now Paul writes a letter to them in response to Timothy's findings.

[Have a class member read I Thessalonians 3:4-8.]

Paul was encouraged. Timothy told Paul about the new Christians' faith and love. We are not given specifics of what Timothy experienced in Thessalonica, that is, how he experienced their faith and love. In our own time, what would be some signs of a church with faith? What would be some signs of a loving church?

Faith and love are not necessarily separate qualities.

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:6.]

How are faith and love tied together? (Faith and love are not easily separated in the Christian faith. One begets the other. One is demonstrated through the other.)

"Their faith represents their attitude toward God rather than their faithfulness, and love is its result. ...When Paul sets out love as that which denotes the Christian life...it is love to all [people] and not to fellow Christians alone." [Ernest Best. *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Harper's New Testament Commentaries. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 1988. p.140.]

When Paul hears of how the Christians in Thessalonica are living their faith through love, he rejoices. When we hear of loving work that other Christians do, what happens inside of us? Do we rejoice? Do we ever look askance, since their theology or ethical stances are not identical to ours?

Since we are part of the "catholic Christians," whatever good work done in the name of love is performed, it is part of our spiritual family's progress. Unfortunately, if there are bad works done through neglect or ignorance or hate, that is part of our family's story as well.

"There must have been times when Paul wondered if it was all worth it. Unpleasant receptions often culminated in rejection, with communities at each other's throats about this or that issue. Paul faced it all. Yet the knowledge that there were great people to rejoice in, a community where there was at least the promise of good things to come, makes all the difference at this juncture. Such knowledge—that there is within reach even a small circle of those who respond and care, who show enthusiasm and purpose—makes all the difference when otherwise disappointment and a sense of defeat could make us their prisoner." [Herbert O'Driscoll. "Pent Up Power." *Christian Century*. Volume 120, Number 23. November 15, 2003. p. 19.]

Why do you remain in the Church in spite of it being a dysfunctional family?

Although the church in Thessalonica had its problems (which Paul addressed later in the

## Information *continued*

letter), knowing that they were keeping the faith and demonstrating Christ's love gave him a refreshed spirit.

[Have a class member read I Thessalonians 3:9-10.]

In this season of Thanksgiving, we note Paul's prayer of thanks for the church in Thessalonica.

What is one thing you give thanks for related to our church?

[Have a class member read I Thessalonians 3:11-13.]

Paul encourages the Thessalonian church to increase and abound in love for one another and for all. Gordon Cosby, founder of The Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, pointed out two barriers to an increasing love within the Church.

First, "We view ourselves in an individualistic way rather than perceiving that our destiny is bound up with the destiny of each of the sister churches. If one is having trouble, we all are in trouble...If one part is doing well, its health strengthens us all. We belong to each other and we belong to the Church — St. James Catholic Church and The First Church of the Nazarene, to the church in South Africa, in Brazil, in India, in Australia — wherever it is." [Elizabeth O'Conner. *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*. NY: Harper and Row. 1979. p. 68f.]

What do you think about this comment about how our church is tied to the larger Church?

Secondly, Cosby says, we have a barrier to increasing love in the Church because we wound our leaders. "It is essential that the body constantly move out to create a unity... The leader is out there doing that...trying to reconcile differences as Christ reconciled differences... 'What blocks the leader,' Gordon says, 'is that when he emerges, we take shots at him. We wound him, we make it difficult for him to do his work.'" (O'Conner. p. 69.)

What do you think about this comment that how we treat our leaders affects our unity and our message of reconciliation?

## Transformational Exercise

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[Note to the teacher: Although you will be encouraging class members to voice prayers, you might want to be prepared with names of churches and ministries for each of the four directions of the compass, so that it primes the pump, if need be.]

I would like for us to conclude this morning's lesson with prayers for our Christian family. I invite us to pray for our sister churches in our community and around the world. We will do this by standing and facing in different directions, north, east, south and west, speaking our prayers in their direction.

I will begin the prayer by saying, "We pray for our brother and sister Christians to our (direction)" and you may name a church or a ministry or a Christian in that direction. It may be a church next door or a church on the other side of the world. Maybe it is a place

## Transformational Exercise *continued*

you have been on a mission trip. Maybe it is a church that has been in the news recently. Maybe it is a church you drive by but know little about. Maybe they are Christians undergoing persecution. And, if you are geographically challenged, we will give you grace — just call out that name whenever it comes to your mind. After I call the direction, anyone may call out a ministry. Then I will move on to the next direction and we will all face that way and pray.

We will begin with a moment of silence, so you can consider who you would like to voice a prayer for.

[After the time of silence and the four directional prayers, close in a prayer something like this: *All over the world, people are worshiping you today. People are serving you today. People all over the world are following in the steps of Jesus Christ. We rejoice that your message of love is for all people. Amen.* ]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Luke and Paul** — Why do we suggest that Luke joined Paul’s traveling party when he came through Philippi? Mainly because Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, was a careful historian. Prior to Paul’s arrival in Troas, Luke speaks of what “Paul” did and where “Paul” went. When Paul set sail from Troas, however, Luke began to use the pronoun “we,” including himself in Paul’s travels (Acts 16:11). Some scholars speculate that Luke, who was Greek, may have been the man in Paul’s vision who said “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9).

**Philippi** — In Philippi, Paul and company met a prayerful woman named Lydia, who became the anchor of a church there. After healing a slave girl who told fortunes, they ran afoul of the authorities and were tried in a kangaroo court, stripped of their clothing, beaten with sticks, and thrown into prison. Delivered from their cell by a providential earthquake, they remained in Philippi for a short time before traveling on, with Thessalonica as their next destination. (Acts 16:11-40).

**Thessalonica** — During the latter part of the first century, Thessalonica was the most populous and popular port city in the province of Macedonia. Like Neapolis and Philippi, the area is now a part of Greece.

Thessalonica was first populated by the displaced inhabitants of 26 villages that were destroyed in 315 B.C. by the Macedonian king Cassander. Cassander built a new city and named it after his wife, who was the daughter of Philip of Macedonia and sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica became a provincial capital in 167 B.C.E. when Macedonia was annexed by Rome. The cosmopolitan nature of the port city was such that it included a sizable Jewish population.

**Life-giving news** — Regarding Paul’s statement that “Now we live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord, F. F. Bruce suggests that it’s as if Paul is saying “the news of your unwavering faith and love is the very breath of life to us” (*1-2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 45 [Thomas Nelson, 1982], 67). Timothy’s news brought relief to their anxious concern for the Thessalonians, Bruce writes, so “Now they could now breathe freely.”

**Was Paul presumptuous?** — While Paul’s desire to “restore whatever is lacking in your faith” may sound presumptuous, the apostle knew that the church’s resources were limited. There were no Christian scriptures or online discipleship courses that Paul could recommend. There were few qualified and doctrinally sound Christian teachers around: Paul was the best source of information they had.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Father, Son, and ?** — In v. 11, it's interesting that Paul speaks of God the Father and Jesus the Son as working closely together, but does not mention the Holy Spirit. We know from many other texts that Paul was a firm believer in the Spirit, however. If the Father and Son should direct Paul back to the Thessalonians, he knew it would be through the medium of the Spirit.

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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## Why was Paul so worried?

Readers may wonder why Paul was so anxious about the Thessalonian believers in general, and about their feelings toward him in person. Paul was greatly relieved to learn not only that they had persevered in faith and love, but also in learning that “you always remember us kindly and long to see us — just as we long to see you” (v. 6).

Why was Paul so concerned about the feelings the Thessalonians had toward him? Several matters could have contributed to Paul’s concern. First, before they left Thessalonica, Jewish opposition had forced Paul and Silas to go into hiding. After recruiting some “ruffians in the marketplace,” they “set the city in an uproar” and “attacked Jason’s house,” knowing that Jason had been hosting them (Acts 17:5). When they could not find Paul and Silas, the mob grabbed Jason along with some other believers and dragged before the city authorities, charging that “These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7).

The officials were disturbed, according to the text. They made no immediate decision but demanded bail money from Jason and the others before releasing them (Acts 17:9). That same night the believers retrieved Paul and Silas from their hiding place and sent them off to Berea (Acts 17:10).

That leaves us with many questions. Did the believers insist that Paul’s company leave town out of loving concern for the evangelists’ safety, or their own? Were they upset that Paul’s presence had gotten them into trouble with the authorities, and thus anxious to get them out of town?

If any of the bail money had been paid on promise of delivering Paul and Silas to the authorities, they would have had to forfeit those funds, which also could have caused resentment.

With their dark-of-night departure, Paul did not have an opportunity to say his farewells in an appropriate manner, to express his appreciation to the believers for their hospitality, or to give them parting words of advice. Would the believers who were not involved in helping Paul and Silas escape have been hurt that they left town without saying goodbye?

Furthermore, it is likely that trouble with the city authorities did not end with the departure of Paul and his companions. The charge of treason for proclaiming Jesus as king still stood, and it had been directed at Jason and the other believers, not just the absent missionaries. If the Jewish leaders continued to press the issue, the believers could have experienced ongoing persecution and trouble with the authorities. They could have begrudged Paul and

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Silas for starting the whole thing and sparking the animosity against them.

Some believers could even have resented Paul and Silas for sending Timothy to check on them, rather than making a quiet visit on their own. Paul had no doubt considered all of these things, and with no ready communication, could have imagined the worst. He feared not only that the young believers might have lost faith, but that they were angry with him, as well.

Earlier, Paul had stressed his desire to return to the Thessalonians, and said he had made several attempts, “but Satan blocked our way” (2:17-18). Concerned for the health of their souls in the midst of persecution, Paul said he could no longer bear the lack of communication between them, and so had sent Timothy “to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions,” for fear that “somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain” (cf. 3:1-5). Paul noted that he had warned them earlier that persecution was inevitable, but that didn’t stop him from worrying about them.

Thus, Paul had good reasons to be anxious, and we can better appreciate the depth of his relief when Timothy reported that the Thessalonian believers were not only persevering in faith and love, but they remembered Paul and Silas fondly and longed to see them again. It’s no wonder that Timothy’s news brought a deep sense of relief and renewal, so that Paul could speak of being comforted or reassured by the news, and say “for now we are alive again” (1 Thes. 3:8a, NET).

## How Big is the “Big C” Church?

(All information is current as of 2010 according to the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project of 2015. Find more information at <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/> )

1. How many Christians are there in the world?
  - a. A trillion.
  - b. A billion.
  - c. 2.2 billion
  - d. Do you mean real Christians or people who claim to be Christians?
2. One out of \_\_\_\_ persons in the world are Christian.
  - a. One
  - b. Two
  - c. Three
  - d. Four
3. By 2050, the world’s population of Christians is expected to
  - a. Plateau
  - b. Shrink
  - c. Grow
  - d. Vanish
4. About 25% of the world’s Christians live in
  - a. Europe
  - b. Latin America
  - c. The Caribbean
  - d. Each of the above
5. What percentage of the world’s Christian population lives in the United States?
  - a. 50%
  - b. 25%
  - c. 12%
  - d. 5%
6. Christianity began in the Middle East — North Africa region. What percentage of that population is Christian?
  - a. 30%
  - b. 10%
  - c. 5%
  - d. Less than 1%
7. Of the world’s Christians, what percentages are...
  - a. Roman Catholic \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Orthodox \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Protestant \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. In the United States, what percentages are ...
  - a. Christian \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Muslim \_\_\_\_
  - c. Jew \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Buddhist \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Hindu \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Folk Religions \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Other religions \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Unaffiliated \_\_\_\_\_
9. Of the United States’ Christians, what percentages are...
  - a. Roman Catholic \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Protestant \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Orthodox \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. catholic \_\_\_\_\_

Key: 1-c; 2-c; 3-c; 4-d (75% live in these three areas, 25% in each area); 5-c; 6-d; 7 — a = 50%, b = 37%, c = 12%, d = 1%; 8 — a = 78%, b = less than 1%, c = 1.8%, d = 1.2%, e = less than 1%, f = less than 1%, g = less than 1%, h = 16%; 9 — a = 24%, b = 50%, c = less than 1%, d = 3%, e = 100% (since catholic means “all, universal”)